

## **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)**

### Briefing Document

April 7, 2003

On April 2, 2003, Governor Frank H. Murkowski announced that Alaska was prepared to address the threat of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). He assured Alaskans that the Alaska Division of Public Health would continue to monitor this international situation and keep the public informed.

### **Background**

On February 26, 2003 the first case of SARS came to the attention of Dr. Carlo Urbani, a World Health Organization (WHO) official in Hanoi, Viet Nam. The patient was a 48-year-old businessman from the United States who stayed at a hotel in Hong Kong before traveling to Hanoi on February 24. He became ill shortly after arrival in Hanoi and was hospitalized on February 26. He was placed on a mechanical ventilator and medically evacuated to a Hong Kong hospital on March 12, where he died. This single case, coupled with the knowledge of an ongoing outbreak of unusual respiratory illness in Guangdong Province (China) prompted Dr. Urbani to report this case to the WHO officials. On March 12 the WHO issued a Global Alert which resulted in worldwide surveillance for persons with severe acute respiratory illness or SARS. By April 1, 2003, heightened surveillance generated 1804 reports of SARS from 15 countries. Sixty-two of these cases died. Tragically, Dr. Urbani himself succumbed to SARS during that period of time.

Immediately following the WHO Global Alert on March 12, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), issued a Health Alert to public health officials in all 50 states. Immediately after receiving this alert, Alaska began enhanced surveillance for SARS. CDC has provided daily briefings with updated recommendations for public health response to SARS, as information about SARS is increasing rapidly.

***To date, there have been no confirmed persons with SARS reported in Alaska.***

### **Response**

With the first notification of SARS from WHO and CDC, the Alaska Division of Public Health (DPH) has taken the following actions:

- Met with key medical and public health providers in Anchorage to establish initial procedures to respond to SARS.

- Forwarded all CDC Health Alerts and Updates to physicians throughout the State using electronic mail systems. These alerts are also posted on First Class, a secure Internet communications system used by first responders throughout Alaska.
- Posted Internet links to the CDC, Health Canada and WHO at [www.AKEPI.org](http://www.AKEPI.org) to streamline access to up-to-date information about SARS.
- Collaborated with the CDC Arctic Investigations Program to meet international passenger flights at the Ted Stevens International Airport, to screen for crew or passengers who have respiratory symptoms.
- Collaborated with the Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Health and Human Services to develop a plan to transport and monitor an ill crew or passengers removed from an international flight.
- Collaborated with all three civilian hospitals in Anchorage to develop a plan to accept, isolate and treat an ill crew member or passenger from an international flight, or any patient who presents with an illness that meets the SARS case definition.
- Developed a flow chart for action by the Surveillance & Outbreak Team
- Prepared a collection kit complete with specimen containers, personal respirators (N95 masks), and instructions, to facilitate a rapid response by the Surveillance & Outbreak Team, should a possible SARS patient be reported.
- Collaborated with the Alaska State Public Health Laboratories to collect and transport clinical specimens from patients suspected to have SARS.
- Trained staff in the Sections of Epidemiology (Surveillance & Outbreak Team) and the Alaska State Laboratories about SARS, including a satellite and web cast update presented by the CDC on April 4, 2003.
- Reviewed the existing State procedures to enable isolation or quarantine under State authority.
- Reviewed the updated federal powers of quarantine for SARS recently signed into law by President Bush.
- Responded to numerous calls about SARS from the public, travelers, health care providers and agencies.
- Gave interviews to numerous public media reporters about SARS.

### **Future response plans**

The Alaska Division of Public Health plans several additional actions to strengthen our ability to respond to SARS:

- Convene a SARS Response Workgroup of key medical and public health stakeholders to review all response steps and to identify unmet needs.
- Provide ongoing briefings and updates to key stakeholders

- Continue to participate in ongoing CDC briefings and implement evolving public health recommendations as new information becomes available.
- Publish an *Epidemiology Bulletin* describing the current status of this new disease and outlining the actions we are taking to prevent SARS in Alaska. This *Bulletin* will tailor current infection control recommendations to the unique and often remote communities in Alaska.
- Continue to forward updated information about SARS to the health care community.
- Develop a press release and fact sheet about SARS.
- Continue to provide interviews for local and statewide media about SARS and the Alaska experience.

## Attachments

1. Governor Murkowski's news release - <http://www.state.ak.us/local/03040202.htm>
2. Section of Epidemiology Internet homepage - <http://www.akepi.org/>
3. Section of Epidemiology draft flowchart for SARS calls - <http://www.akepi.org/id/dod/sars/episarscallflow.pdf>
4. CDC SARS fact sheet - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/factsheet.htm>
5. Updated U.S. SARS case definition - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/pdf/sars-casedefinition.pdf>
6. CDC list of SARS cases by State - <http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/sars.htm>
7. CDC interim guidance for state & local health departments - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/doh-guidance.pdf>
8. CDC infection control and quarantine information - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/pdf/isolationquarantine.pdf>
9. U.S. Health Alert card for travelers - [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel\\_alert.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/travel_alert.pdf)
10. CDC SARS web page with listing of resources - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars>
11. CNN report: Bush order allows SARS quarantine - <http://www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/04/04/sars.bush/index.html>
12. CNN report: California officials: SARS in under control - <http://www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/04/03/sars.california.ap/index.html>